

One consequence of the House Republican effort to eliminate mass transit from the Highway Trust Fund may well be to undermine ability to ever get the resources we need for all our surface transportation needs.

Study after study has documented the woeful inadequacy of current funding levels to meet the needs of America's existing roads, bridges, and transit -- much less deal with the demands of future expansion, technology and growth. For the last decade there has been a growing consensus and unprecedented cooperation among civic and professional groups, business, labor, environment, and local governments to form a coalition to make sure America keeps moving.

Representatives of truckers, bicyclists, engineers, contractors - a diverse and rich roster of every conceivable interest that cares about the integrity of this program -- have come together with an increasingly shared vision and interest. They understand that transit is a critical partner along with roads, bridges, and railroads.

There is even a critical role for bike and pedestrian facilities in our transportation system. The wildly popular " [Safe Routes to School](#) " program has assumed outsized significance not just as a simple, cost effective way to improve the safety and health of our children, but as an effective way to engage the public in improving community transportation systems.

Instead of dealing meaningfully with the long term resource problem, Republicans would instead strip out the 20% of the Highway Trust Fund that is dedicated to mass transit projects and use those resources to make up the revenue shortfall for highways. Since this still leaves a large funding gap, they would further reduce the cost of the Highway program by removing programs like Transportation Enhancements and CMAC from the federal highway program. These program would then be forced to compete with transit for a much smaller revenue pool.

Even after shifting these effective programs and popular programs, first authorized by ISTEA in 1991, and raiding all the funding previously allocated to fund transit, the Highway Trust Fund would still show a \$4.9 billion shortfall. But more significant than this immediate shortfall is what's going to happen in the long term. The shortfall is doomed to grow ever larger because the current revenue stream based on fuel consumption will never keep pace with the demands of wear and tear on the system, to say nothing of the program increases needed for growth and

expansion.

Increased fuel efficiency and inflation have reduced the per-mile cost that motorists pay by 50% since 1993. With the increasing use of hyper-efficient diesel trucks, hybrid cars, plug-in hybrids, and electric cars, that deficit is only going to grow worse. Not only is this bill not a long term solution, it makes a long term solution more difficult.

If we strip out the most popular programs, the large and growing coalition that supports a broader vision and seeks sustainable transportation resources will have to fend for themselves. Their advocates will lose their incentive to collaborate with traditional highway interests and will instead go off on their own, in direct competition for attention, existing resources, and new funding. At a time when we have proven that balanced transportation choices are more acceptable to the public across the country, this would be a tragic mistake.

For example, I remember former Phoenix Mayor Paul Johnson telling me that that a road-only solution, even in his auto-dominated city, would not get public support for new revenues. However, when the funding proposal included mass transit -- in particular the new light rail program -- the public approved the needed revenue increases. This experience has been replicated around the nation, demonstrating that the programs the Republican Leadership has designated as "Alternative Transportation" are usually more popular than just building roads.

At precisely the time we should be reinforcing the broad-based coalition that supports transportation choices, looking at longer term solutions, and transitioning from a gas tax to a more sustainable form of revenue, the House Leadership is proposing a U-Turn. Their proposal may reduce some of the funding pressure in the short term, but it will shatter the essential coalition and set up a scramble for resources that will make the long-term financial stability of our roads and bridges even more precarious.

It's time to stop the nonsense. There's no need to create an unnecessary "food fight," intensifying the divisions between people who have been working in harmony to address these critical problems. We should reject this fatally flawed program, which would end up doing long-term damage to the very road interests they claim to support. Instead, we need to build on the coalition and strengthen the ISTEA structure to get the resources needed to Rebuild and Renew America. Americans need to work together for our future.

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